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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0867
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000094

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: SENATORS PRESS FOR CLEAR EUROPEAN STANCE AGAINST
JUNTA,

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Cornelius C. Walsh for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In separate discussions with two senators representing different factions, both underlined concerns that European ambiguity and concessions to the Junta allow General Aziz to consolidate power. This is, they intimated, an economic, human rights and political disaster. Senator Mohamed Ould Sid Ahmed (Assaba region), a member of the neutral group of 20 senators Lahrar ("The Free"), stated that Aziz' continuance in power is unacceptable and international pressure is needed to prevent him from running in the projected June elections. He added that a climate of fear has developed as Aziz reinforces his base. Earlier on the same day, senator Zeinabou Mint Dedde (Tevragh Zeina) of the Islamic Tawassoul party and a strong anti-Junta FNDD supporter echoed his thoughts. She emphasized the importance of US pressure on the Europeans to adopt a unified policy. The only reason, she said, that the military is determined to stay in power is that they receive mixed signals from the Europeans and some Africans. To her, the February 5 AU meeting is crucial in establishing a united international front against the Junta. End Summary.

Aziz Should Not Run

12. (C) In a surprising change of position, Mohamed Ould Sid Ahmed, a leader in the Lahrar grouping, told Poloff on January 28 that Aziz must be stoped from running for president. Ould Sid Ahmed explained that originally he and the other Lahrar senators did not take positions against the military or in favor of Abdallahi to avoid being pulled towards extremes that could lead to violence. The Lahrar group had hoped to influence events from the inside but say the military has stifled their voices. Now they feel that "Aziz's permanence in power is unacceptable" though they remain opposed to Abdallahi's return. Ould Sid Ahmed stated that if Aziz wants to run for office he should step down now and do so like any other candidate.

"This is Aziz's Coup"

13. (C) While stating that he was speaking for himself and not on behalf of the group, Ould Sid Ahmed said that he is

convinced that "this is Aziz' coup" and that "the other military in the High State Council are not in agreement." He claims that the military have collaborated with Aziz to save face and avoid schisms within the armed forces that could lead to a deeper and more violent crisis.

A Climate of Fear

¶4. (C) The senator stated that others are not taking clear positions against Aziz because they are afraid of what would happen if the General stays in power. If it became clear that Aziz had no future, people would take a clear cut position. Ould Sid Ahmed said Aziz is intimidating people and there is a generalized climate of fear. The senator told Poloff: "This is a very dangerous situation and I fear the worst."

The EU Can Stop Aziz

¶5. (C) According to Ould Sid Ahmed, Aziz has decided to stay in power at all costs but continual pressure on him is useful. He said that the threat of sanctions would bring changes in attitude in the Army. Nevertheless, he stressed that the ambivalent position of France is undermining the effectiveness of international efforts. The Spanish and the Germans are not helping either. He feels that the military would listen to a clear, strong, and unified EU position. He stated that the US position has been useful but ideological

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due to limited US interests in Mauritania. European interests, on the other hand, are deeper and firmness from the Europeans will have an effect. He said the Moroccans have been very damaging as they are speaking on behalf of Aziz.

We Need Someone to Bring Us Together

¶6. (C) When questioned about solutions, the senator does not see Abdallahi as viable. Nevertheless, he feels Abdallahi could contribute to re-establishing constitutional order by curtailing his mandate and facilitating early elections. RFD president and nominal opposition leader Ahmed Ould Daddah can help by putting aside his personal vendetta against the president. Ould Daddah's original support for the coup was payback for Abdallahi's acceptance of a tarnished mandate supported as he was by the military and Aziz. Ould Sid Ahmed also cited rivalries between Ould Daddah and National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir as an obstacle to a united front. He feels the conversation has to shift from extreme positions centered on individuals -- Abdallahi vs. Aziz -- towards a pro-democracy vs. dictatorship debate. The emergence of a neutral politician who has taken no part in these rivalries is necessary to push the country forward. The senator said: "We are too busy trying to eliminate each other; someone who took no part in this situation could unite us."

Aziz Opposes Vall

¶7. (C) The senator stated that Aziz' worst nightmare is Vall's return. Ould Sid Ahmed said that Aziz "would rather have Abdallahi return to power than see his cousin in the presidency." He thinks that the reason Vall has not expressed his views openly is that he's afraid of being thrown in jail.

The Military will Eliminate Aziz

¶8. (C) According to the senator, if the military sees that Aziz is cornered, they will eliminate him. There could be a second coup and even an attempt to kill Aziz. As the situation grows more desperate, Aziz will increase the military presence around him, thus providing the military with an opportunity to carry out a counter coup. The senator hopes the crisis can be resolved with the least possible violence as a second coup d'etat could have an explosive effect.

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Without International Support, They Will Leave
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¶10. (C) Earlier in the morning, Poloff also met with Tevragh Zeina senator, FNDD activist, and Tawassoul party member Zeinabou Mint Dedde, whose opinions about the situation echo Ould Sid Ahmed's. Mint Dedde pleaded that the US maintain its strong position and influence its European partners to adopt a unified front against Aziz. She feels the dictatorship is a threat to political stability and that the only reason the military are determined to stay in power is because they have received mixed signals from the Europeans. For her, the international community needs to take a strong stance against the coup during the February 5 AU session.

¶11. (C) Comment: Post memory identifies Sid Ahmed as close to Ghazwani (Junta #2), an "Islamist", and not congenial to American interests. Whether he is stalking for a possible Ghazwani role in a new structure, worried as the junta moves against so called Islamists, or merely expressing, as others, growing concern about Aziz, is unclear. End Comment.

¶12. (C) Comment: The approach of the AU session, the EU February 20 meeting, and growing conviction that the June 6 Election process may become a reality is focusing minds and

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raising anxieties. On January 25, Senator Sylla (Mbout) expressed his concern to Charge that Aziz was preparing a second coup d'etat in parliament. On January 27, Mohamed Yehdid, President of the L'Alternative political party and a member of Aziz's tribe, expressed to DCM his reservations about the new elections. He mentioned that the military would accept a solution that allows them to save face. End Comment.
WALSH